International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)
ISSN(P): 2249-6912; ISSN(E): 2249-8028
Vol. 4, Issue 1, Feb 2014, 45-50
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TRANS STELLAR
• Journal Publications • Research Consultancy

RABINDRA NATH TAGORE'S *THE KING OF THE DARK CHAMBER:* SOUL'S RELENTLESS JOURNEY FOR UNISON WITH DIVINE

RASHMI GUPTA[1] & JAYA TRIPATHI MISHRA[2]

[1]Professor, I.T.S Engineering College, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

[2]Assistant Professor, I.T.S Engineering College, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

The image of Tagore in the west is that of a 'great mystic' from the east. Tagore was deeply spiritual in his outlook on life. He emphasized that true religion exists in the purity of the soul and true worship of God can be done by adoring the divinity in man.

His one of the best known plays, the *King of the Dark Chamber* (1910) originally written in Bengali is considered to be his most significant offerings as a dramatist. The play explores some of the dramatist's basic concept about truth, spirituality and beauty. The unseen King here represents the God, whom mankind can not see with mortal eyes but can only feel him in inner dark recesses of his soul. In the same manner Queen Sudarshana represents an ignorant human soul in search of her true identity. Here the relationship between the Queen Sudarshana and the King is symbolic for the relationship between man and the divine.

This paper is an attempt to study an individual's spiritual and personal journey in his journey for unison with divine. The play revolves around self realization of the truth and the divinity. Tagore believed that life is a dynamic force which cannot be confined in dark chambers of isolation from the God, the divine source of his origin.

KEYWORDS: Rabindra Nath Tagore, Journey, Unison with Divine, Truth, Spirituality, True Religion, Dark Chamber, Symbolic Relationship, Inner Recesses

INTRODUCTION

Rabindra Nath Tagor's dramas, originally written in Bengali, have been widely translated into English. Some of his well known plays include *Chitra (Chitrangada, 1892), Sanyasi (Prakrtir Pratisodh, 1884), Sacrifice (Visarajan, 1890), The King and the Queen (Raja O Rani, 1889)*. These plays have got some Tagore's finest poetry. Apart from these poetical plays his prominent allegorical and symbolic plays have also caught the attention of the critics and readers world wide some of his renowned plays in this category are : *The King of the Dark Chamber (Raja ,1910), The Waterfall (Mukta Dhara ,1922) The Red Oleanders (Raktakarabi , 1926) and The Post office (Dakghar, 1912).*

Tagore started the league of these symbolic and spiritual plays with *Sanyasi*. Here the central figure of the play is a hermit, who celebrates his loneliness. Through his loneliness the dark eternity is contrasted with the confined earth. Sen Gupta has interpreted this play as "Representing a stage in the poet's own development. Because like the Sanyasi, he was absorbed in his self and like the Sanyasi he emerges into the open air life of nature, beauty, human love, joy and sorrow." (Sengupta:145)

Among his divine plays the most noteworthy one is the *The King of the Dark Chamber*. The play luminously explores the quintessential spiritual concept of relationships between the divine and the man engrossed in the darkness of the world. Tagore, the exponent of spiritual poetry and drama, has elaborated and discussed in depth the basic concept of the religion, through the characters of the King and the Queen Sudarshana. According to him the soul of man seeks freedom from ignorance or darkness and this can be achieved only by "the realization of truth of oneness, the oneness of our soul with the world and of the world-soul with the supreme lover (i.e. God)" (Tagore: 116). This play depicts an individual's spiritual and personal quest from darkness to enlightenment, and it stands true for the central characters. The theme of the play can be visualized in two ways. First, it stands simply for the worldly liaison between the man and woman based on physical beauty and on a more serious spiritual note it also signifies the relationship between the divine and the man.

DISCUSSIONS

In this play, the King is an allegorical figure that represents divine which cannot be seen by naked eyes but can only be seen in the dark chamber of inner consciousness. He leads an extremely secluded life from the outer world. His subjects have never seen him. He meets his queen only in the dark chamber. She desperately yearns to see and know him as she told Surangama,

> **Sudarshana:** "I have not seen him yet for a single day. He comes to me in the darkness, and leaves me in this dark room again. How many people have I not asked- but they all give me vague answers- it seems to me that they all keep something back …..I must see him at any cost."
> (KDC: 26-27)

Some of the people find it difficult to believe that the king really exist while others are so faithful and devoted to him that they neither questioned nor demanded any proof of his existence. Some people like the maidservant Surangama blindly worshipped him and developed a sense of his being present near her as explained in the following lines:

> **Surangama:** The outer door has opened…he is coming, he is coming, and my king is coming.
>
> **Sudarshana:** How can you perceive when he comes?
>
> **Surangama:** I cannot say; I seem to hear his footsteps in my heart. Serving him in this Dark chamber, I have gained this new sense—I know and feel without seeing. (KDC: 27)

Surangama, is spiritually awakened and therefore she tries to explain to the queen the true nature of God. Later, on the Queen's insistence, the king promises to appear during the festival of full moon of the spring in the pleasure garden. But as the human soul is entrapped in the whirls of this world and is unable to realize the true nature and beauty of God, similarly Queen Sudarshana, while waiting for her King, is deceived by the impostor Suvarna and assumes him to be the real king.

The Queen was completely smitten by the handsome looks of Suvarna. The Princes of Avanti, Koshala, Vidharbha, Virat, Panchala and Kalinga led by the king of Kanchi plotted along with Survana to possess the queen. In his pursuit of physical beauty the king of Kanchi, sets the palace on fire. These Kings here are symbols of seven deadly sins of life which are always ready to enslave human soul and destroy and detach it from its real abode. Through this episode, Tagore wants to emphasize the fact that the world of illusion is self destructive and is far removed from the world of truth. To save oneself from the raging fire of eternal inferno, one must annihilate his selfish desires of enjoying gross materialistic pleasures. Desires of man are endless but once he realizes that worldly possessions are not the end, but he has

to outgrow his desire for them, then that very moment his soul takes to the path of the eternal. Queen Sudarshana felt the same after the identity of imposter dawned upon her

> **Sudarshana:** No king! He is not the king? Then, O Thou God of fire, burn me to ashes! I throw my self into thy hands, O thou great purifier; burn to ashes my shame, my desire. (KDC: 63)

This feeling does not last for long as at this crucial moment the real king appeared and saved the queen.. But the Queen was startled by the ugly looks of the King of Dark Chamber. She was again overpowered by the physical beauty and worldly pleasure of life and it's clearly reflected in her utterances,

> **Sudarshana:** Terrible …You are dark and terrible as the everlasting night. I can not bear your presence, I shell never, can never, desire you. I have seen what I love- it is soft as cream, delicate as the shirisha flower, beautiful as butter fly. (KDC: 66-68)*Here she is referring to the imposter Suvarna again.*

Despite King's insistence on the fact that the beauty, she was obsessed with is a mirage, an empty bubble, she fails to understand the worth of true love of the king of the dark chamber. At this point starts, the Queen's quest of spiritual truth and divine within herself.

Very calmly, the king sets her free as he knows that the darkness which has engulfed her soul will be a source of solace and salvation in the future. The supreme power never compels human beings to surrender themselves to the divine wish. The spiritual beauty of divine lies in voluntary human actions that involve self denial of carnal desires. In this regard, the great saint Thomas Aquinas once said that "Spiritual beauty is the beauty of the soul. Thus, when the soul is defiled by sin, God is offended." Therefore, when the queen whose soul has been denigrated by worldly sins wants herself to be punished by the king; the King 'a divine symbol', replied that her punishment has already begun and,

> **King:** No on will stand in your way. You can go as free as the broken storm-cloud driven by the tempest.
>
> **Sudarshana:** …I am breaking away from my anchor! Perhaps I shall sink, but I shall return no more. (KDC: 70)

As we know, we are all a small particle of the divine and this true nature of our self always try to drive us towards God, but the false pride of ego and arrogance over powers us and we are misled from the righteous path of salvation. Because of this only the queen could not completely surrender the king at this moment.

The queen in pursuit of her worldly desires tried to flee along with Suragama to the king of Kanyakuvja, her father. But here too she found herself in the most miserable condition. Even her father did not give her a welcome befitted for a queen and made her live like a maid servant in the palace. The strange behavior on the part of the king of Kanyakuvja is perhaps due tothe realization of the fact that she has come to his state laden with peril i.e. will bring misfortune for his state. We can analyze the king's behavior in the light of Surangama's warning that she had given to the queen before coming to Kanyakuvja,

> **Surangama:** Do you not fear to meet the monstrous Many? ...I already feel its hissing breath all around us.
>
> **Sudarshana:** The multitude is my salvation. I will lose and forget myself in its arms. (KDC: 72)

Surangama actually here represents the messenger of God, who always try to show the queen the right path and despite the fact that the queen did not pay any heed to her warnings she accompanied her to Kanyakuvja with an undying motive of saving her from imminent destruction and uniting her with the real divine again. As Surangama had predicted the Monstrous Many, i.e. the seven kings attacked the kingdom of Kanyakuvja collectively to possess the queen Sudarshana.

Though the king of Kanyakuvja was sure about his inevitable defeat at the hands of group of kings, yet he sets out to fight with them. At this moment the divine King appears and defeats all the kings and disappears again.

The Queen now humbled by the realization of the greatness of the King desperately seeks union with the almighty King of the kings; but she is so ashamed of her own deeds that she has no courage to face the King. Surangama who has been there for the queen at all odd hours, suggests her that she should go to the King in utmost humility and all her shame will vanish in a moment. It echoes again the archetypal philosophy of *Bhagwat Gita* where the Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to discard all the materialistic love and affection and take the ultimate shelter under the wings of divine. And this is the only way to get rid of all superficial bondages of this body.

But, again the principle of free will is there, where a soul has the right to embrace or discard the way of salvation. Though the Queen admits her defeat, the hidden guilt in the Queen prevents her from going to the King and she wishes that the King should come to her and accept her. During her discourse with Dada, a recurring character in Tagore's dramas, regarding the true nature of the king, she realizes that the God has given her the free will and and she will have to cast away the arrogance and pride to surrender before the God. It is only through self annihilation that one can see and feel the presence of the divine light around him. The same happens with the Queen; with a burning desire to see her King, she sets out on her ultimate journey from self centered life to a God centered one. She has detached herself from life driven by sensory pleasures to that of true beauty of soul for which she has trodden a hard and weary road sans her pride to achieve her ultimate goal. She utterly surrendered her self to the King and said,

> **Sudarshana:** I am the servant of your feet…I only seek the privilege of serving you… I was repelled from you because I had sought to find you in the pleasure garden, in my Queen's chamber; there even meanest servant looks fairer than you. That fever of longing has left my eyes for ever. You are not beautiful, my lord—you are beyond compare. (KDC: 111-112)

Now, the king opens the doors of his chamber to let the queen enter, as she has shed off all the physical and material charms- the only condition set by the God to accept the human soul and lead it on the path of everlasting joy,

> **King:** I open the doors of this dark room today – the game is finished here! Come, come with me now, and come out side – into the light.
>
> **Sudarshana:** Before I go, let me bow at the feet of my lord of darkness, my cruel, my terrible, my peerless one. (KDC: 112)

CONCLUSIONS

The King of the Dark Chamber echoes the core philosophy of Rabindra Nath Tagore, which is also the heart of Hindu religion and philosophy. The drama takes us on an enlightening spiritual voyage and narrates the tale of a soul which is trapped in the mire of this world through the character of the Queen Sudarshana.

Through her journey, Tagore adroitly presents the fact that the quest for beauty is eternal and universal. This quest and an eye for beauty have always been there and different cultures have defined it in their own peculiar way. Appreciation of Beauty is often related to truth, perfection, pleasure, love and integrity; and in this play the Queen finds true beauty only after self obliteration. It also echoes Tagore's repeatedly emphasized preaching on Indian Philosophy of oneness of individual that is the cause for the progression of the soul towards the unification with the ultimate power underlying the universe, from which everything comes and to which it returns. The real truth lies in the fact that we all

have divine spark lying dormant with in us, we only have to lighten it up at the right time and strive to achieve communion with God so that we can move from imperfection to perfection.

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